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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 006094

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [IS](#) [IT](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: NETANYAHU IN ROME: SUCCESSFUL FIRST TRIP AS FM

REF: TEL AVIV 7148

CLASSIFIED BY: POL MC THOMAS COUNTRYMAN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: ROME WAS ISRAEL FM NETANYAHU'S FIRST STOP IN HIS FIRST EUROPEAN TOUR SINCE HE ASSUMED THE FUNCTIONS OF FM. BOTH SIDES PLACED EMPHASIS ON THE GREATER BALANCE IN ITALY'S
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APPROACH TO THE MIDDLE EAST SINCE BERLUSCONI TOOK OFFICE, THOUGH THE ITALIANS MADE CLEAR TO NETANYAHU THAT THEY WILL NOT SEVER ALL CONTACT WITH ARAFAT. NETANYAHU BELIEVES THAT THE EU'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THE CONFLICT WILL BE MORE EVENHANDED DURING ITALY'S EU PRESIDENCY THE SECOND HALF OF 2003, THOUGH HE HAD NO ENTHUSIASM FOR THE EU ROLE WITHIN THE QUARTET. SENIOR ITALIAN OFFICIALS REITERATED THEIR BELIEF IN THE ROLE OF THE QUARTET AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE "ROAD MAP" LEADING TO THE CREATION OF A PALESTINIAN STATE EXISTING IN PEACE AND SECURITY NEXT TO THE STATE OF ISRAEL. END SUMMARY.

[12.](#) (U) NETANYAHU HAD A BUSY TWO-DAY VISIT TO ROME DEC 18-19 WHERE HE MET WITH PM BERLUSCONI, FM FRATTINI, MOD MARTINO, DEPUTY PM FINI, PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE PERA, AND PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE CASINI. AMBASSADOR SEMBLER HOSTED A DINNER FOR NETANYAHU, A LONG TIME ACQUAINTANCE, DEC 18. AT ALL THESE EVENTS, AND IN HIS PUBLIC COMMENTS, NETANYAHU'S CORE TALKING POINTS TRACKED CLOSELY WITH HIS RECENT CAMPAIGN SPEECHES AND WITH THE PRESENTATION HE GAVE TO CODEL PRICE/DAVIS (REFTEL): THE ISSUE IS NOT ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION, BUT THE WORLDWIDE ISLAMIC TERRORISM; ISRAEL HAS BEEN TOO RESTRAINED IN NOT EXILING ARAFAT; PALESTINIANS CAN HAVE SELF-GOVERNMENT, BUT NEVER A STATE, ETC.

[13.](#) (C) OUR ITALIAN AND ISRAELI SOURCES TOLD US THAT LITTLE NEW INFORMATION WAS DISCUSSED IN THE MEETINGS WHICH THEY DESCRIBED NONETHELESS AS "USEFUL" FOR BOTH SIDES. LUCA FERRARI, THE MFA'S OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES WHO ATTENDED THE MEETING WITH FM FRATTINI, DESCRIBED NETANYAHU'S SPEECH AS "A LECTURE AT THE AMERICAN
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ENTREPRISE INSTITUTE," FULL OF HIS USUAL "CAMPAIGN PITCH" AND A CLEARLY STATED POSITION THAT ISRAEL'S PROBLEM IS PART OF A WORLDWIDE MUSLIM TERRORISM PROBLEM.

[14.](#) (C) NETANYAHU TOLD AMB. SEMBLER THAT ISRAEL DEEPLY APPRECIATED THE DRAMATIC CHANGE IN ITALY'S RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL SINCE BERLUSCONI TOOK OFFICE, AND THE MAJOR REDUCTION IN ARAFAT'S STANDING WITH ITALY IN THE LAST EIGHT MONTHS. TO ALL HIS ITALIAN INTERLOCUTORS, NETANYAHU SAID THAT, IN THE MIDDLE EAST, ISRAEL IS THOUGHT OF AS THE "SMALL SATAN", THE U.S. BEING THE "BIG SATAN." NOW, ADDED NETANYAHU, ITALY IS BECOMING THE "MEDIUM SATAN." FERRARI SAID THE NEXT DAY THAT THIS REMARK OF NETANYAHU'S HAD HIT THE RIGHT CHORD WITH ITALIAN OFFICIALS, WHO ARE AWARE OF THE RISKS BEING RUN BY ITALY'S ACTIVITIES TO DISRUPT TERRORIST OPERATIONS. FERRARI ADDED THAT NETANYAHU TOLD FRATTINI THAT ITALY IS ONE OF THE FEW RELIABLE PARTNERS ISRAEL HAS WITHIN THE EU. NETANYAHU WAS PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED WITH MOD MARTINO FOR HIS PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE OF THE WHOLE WORLD AND HIS COMMITMENT TO ACTIVELY COMBAT TERRORISM.

[15.](#) (C) THE ISRAELIS ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE ITALIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EU, DURING THE SECOND HALF OF 2003, WILL BE FAR MORE BALANCED THAN THE CURRENT DANISH PRESIDENCY. IN FACT, EHUD GOL, THE AMBASSADOR OF ISRAEL IN ROME, HAS BEEN LOBBYING THE MFA AND WRITING OP-EDS AFTER EVERY SINGLE DANISH STATEMENT ON THE MIDDLE EAST. FERRARI HOWEVER DID NOT HIDE HIS ANGER AT THE "UTTERLY NONPROFESSIONAL" BEHAVIOR OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY EARLIER THIS MONTH WHEN IT QUOTED VERBATIM BERLUSCONI'S STATEMENT, IN A PRIVATE MEETING WITH ISRAELI PRESIDENT KATSAV DEC 11, THAT THE CHIGI (ITALY'S PRIME MINISTERIAL PALACE) HAD
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"CUT OFF ALL CONTACT WITH ARAFAT AND HIS REPRESENTATIVES" AFTER THE KILLINGS OF 29 ISRAELIS ON MARCH 27. (IN FACT, NABIL SHA'ATH HAD BEEN IN THE CHIGI JUST DAYS BEFORE KATSAV). FERRARI SAID THE ISRAELIS HAD SCORED A TEMPORARY PROPAGANDA POINT, UNTIL THE PM'S OFFICE WAS FORCED TO DENY THE STATEMENT. BUT THE RESULTING FUROR IN THE ITALIAN PRESS WOULD NOW CONSTRAIN THE ITALIAN MFA'S ABILITY TO STEER A MORE BALANCED COURSE; ITS EVERY MOVE AND STATEMENT WOULD NOW BE

SCRUTINIZED MORE CLOSELY BY THE ARAFAT SYMPATHIZERS, WHO WERE
NUMEROUS NOT ONLY IN THE OPPOSITION, BUT WITHIN BERLUSCONI'S
CENTER-RIGHT COALITION. POL MC SHARED FERRARI'S ASTONISHMENT
THAT THE ISRAELIS NEVER EVEN APOLOGIZED FOR THE GAFFE.

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